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The Gathering Storm . . . By William S. White

Vietnam Casts a Bleak Light

A BLEAK winter's test is coming for this Government's determination to go on to the end against Communist aggression in South Vietnam unless a decent peace can be found through genuine and honorable negotiations. The storm is gathering; all concerned might as well know it now.

White

Externally, the entire Communist world is united now in at least one objective. That world has opened a massive propaganda push to talk us or to frighten us out of Vietnam. Even the bitter rivalry between the Soviet Union and Red China over global strategy—the Russians insisting basically upon indirect means to forward the Communist revolution and the Chinese insisting upon outright war to any and all limits—has been muted temporarily in behalf of the grand immediate objective of driving us from Vietnam.

Externally, too, the neutralist powers are joining the siege of wills on the side of the Communuist imperalists. Our Western Allies themselves will soon be under yet heavier pressure than now to urge upon Washington that wonderfully easy way out which so appeals to the little but loud minority here at home whose honest horror of war leads it to forget the catastrophic folly of appeasement under whatever name.

But it is here at home that the mightiest winds of all will shortly be blowing; and these will be crosswinds from the left and the right. No informed man here now doubts that when Congress reassembles in a few weeks two bitter competing gales can be expected.

ONE WILL seek to force us to give up through some fraudulent "negotiation" that would in fact mean abandonment of our commitment to the people of South Vietnam. The other will seek to force this Government to expand the war with a reckless violence that might involve us in a continental showdown with Communist China itself.

Each campaign will have great superficial appeal to those who are inclined, once frustration sets in, to look to either-or courses. How wonderful, indeed, it would be if we could extricate ourselves through some grand but empty "conference." How wonderful, indeed, it would be if we could solve all our problems and discharge all our duty simply by bombing farther and farther northward.

But neither dream, however attractive, is open to rational men. The first would throw away our national position in all the world and in truth bankrupt the whole policy of deterrence which alone has so long kept most of the earth at peace.

The second approach could take the globe into nuclear holocaust.

ALL THAT is left open is the hard, unpretty middle way which has only commonsense to recommend it. This is the way of more of the same; of the steadfast application of such rising power as may be required to free South Vietnam of invading forces—but of such power and no more.

The highest American authorities are convinced that this way will work at last, if only patience and fortitude remain with our cause. They are equally convinced that we must not expand our war aims to some foolish extreme.

So the coming months will require self-restraint and a sense of responsibility as rarely they have been required among individual citizens no less than among elected officials and in both political parties. This winter is going to divide the men from the boys.

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